

NUTRITION

Do Potato Chips Cause Cancer?

Last year, Swedish researchers announced the presence of acrylamide, a known carcinogen, in potato chips and French fries. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has since released new data confirming its presence in certain U.S. food products. Even in reduced-fat versions of those foods that are either baked or fried with a fat substitute, acrylamide shows up. This news shouldn't cause any panic. Despite these surprising discoveries, it is still unclear whether the amount of acrylamide present in food poses a threat. Acrylamide seems to form during high temperature cooking of certain high carbohydrate foods. Although it induces cancer in animals in large doses, there is no evidence that the lower amounts in food threaten consumers.

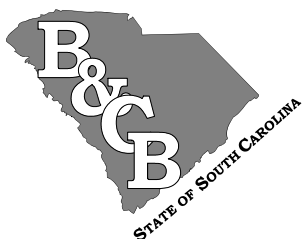
Years ago, people believed that if a substance could cause cancer it was unsafe to have in our food in any amount. Yet, because scientists can now detect the presence of substances in amazingly small amounts, the quantities recorded may be too little to pose any risk. When it comes to acrylamide, scientists still aren't sure how much is needed for cancer risk. Because acrylamide concentrations vary widely – even in different brands of the same food – it may be possible to minimize or even eliminate acrylamide through changes in temperature, cooking time or another part of preparation.

While some people panic over chemicals such as acrylamide in food as a major cancer concern, researchers say they are not a major risk. Studies show that a person's overall diet is much more important. For example, if people ate at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, cancer rates could decrease by 20 percent. By choosing an apple instead of chips and a salad instead of French fries, you can increase your daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

The acrylamide question needs further study, but the best advice for those concerned about cancer risk remains unchanged. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), you should eat a diet high in plant foods, especially vegetables and fruits, which provide vitamins, dietary fiber and naturally occurring phytochemicals that help prevent cancer in different ways. You should also limit fried, fatty and salty foods.

For some creative ideas about healthy snacks, you can call AICR at 1-800-843-8114, ext. 10 and request *Sneak Health Into Your Snacks*.

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research



STATE HEALTH PLAN PREVENTION PARTNERS
South Carolina Budget and Control Board
Employee Insurance Program
July 2003

